

Enid's Marquis James Wrote About Early Days In County

By Stella Campbell Rockwell



Marky's Enid ©1910

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Marquis James was 2 years old when he arrived in Enid. His father, Houstin James, had made the run from the line north of Hennessey and had staked a claim southeast of Enid the SE/4 Section 17, Township 22 North, Range 6 W.I.M.

A lawyer, Houstin James was active in many projects in the new town of Enid. One such project was getting the county's first courthouse built by some of the Enid businessmen. The courthouse was rented at a reasonable rate to the county for four years with the deed then going to the county. He also campaigned for the county changing its name to Garfield from "O." The Enid City Council paid tribute to Houstin by naming James Street in his honor.

Young Marquis attended the first through third grades at East Hill School (now Garfield) and the fourth through eighth grades at Central School in the 300 block of East Cherokee. He started Enid High School while it was still housed in four rooms on the second floor of the Opera House in the 200 block of E. Street (now East Broadway).

As an adult, Marquis James attained renown as a Pulitzer Prize winner for his volume, "The Raven." One day, however, his daughter said: "Pop, why don't you write some of the things you tell about instead of what you do write?" That triggered the book best loved by Oklahomans, especially those who live in Garfield County: "The Cherokee Strip," published in 1945.

He told of his boyhood days in Enid, of his fascination with the stories told by many of the old settlers about cowboys, Indians, gold mining days, and outlaws from Billy the Kid to the Daltons and Yeagers.

He recalled that Mr. Parker of Parker's Bookstore would let him sit on the back stoop and read from any of the secondhand books on his shelves.

One day he wandered in through the back door of the local newspapers, the Eagle. He discovered how type was set and how newspapers were printed and he was awed by it.

"Marky," as Enid residents called him then, soon discovered the second-floor room on the west side of the square which housed the Enid Public Library. Jennie Kelso would suggest books for him to reach and allow him to sit on the floor in the library room, where he would read to his heart's content. So his interest in literature had an early start and increased with the years.

As a sixth-grader he wrote a poem and dropped it in the door slot at the Democrat newspaper. To his delight it was printed. The summer after eight grade, he went to work as a reporter for another local newspaper, The Events. He taught himself to use a typewriter he found in his father's law office. One time Marky and another youngster decided to start their own newspaper. Thus the Evening Squeak was born.

Working at The Events, he persuaded the newspaper to start a "Poet's Corner" and he helped keep it full. He started collecting items for the personals column . . . who was in town, whose barn had been painted, what family had a baby. He learned to quiz the rural mail carriers to pick up items about the families on their routes. The second week at that his pay was doubled – from \$1 to \$2 a week.

His high school years were busy. The school had moved to its own new building on North Independence and Mark was vice president of his freshman class. Later, he was on the debate team and president of the Philistines, a debating club.

But his big achievement in high school was being one of the students who started The Quill, a monthly publication which eventually developed into the school's annual yearbook. The Quill also is now the name of the school's weekly newspaper. The first issue of The Quill came out in December, 1908. Milton H. Wright was principal; the assistant principal was J. H. Barnes. Karl Green of the class of 1909 was editor-in-chief that year, with Marquis E. James of the Class of 1910, serving as associate editor. R. McKinley Crouse, class of 1910, was business manager.

In the first issue they listed the Enid High faculty – English, Milton H. Wright and Elise M. Nelson; Science: J. H. Barnes and Maud A. Carabin; Mathematics: Lena B. Henson and Maud A. Carabin; history: C.E. Deming; Latin and French: Ida E. Williams; German: Nell F. Taylor; Commercial dept: C.V. Crumley; Art: Ina L. Taylor, and music: M. Edith Reynolds.

They also listed class officers – Seniors: Karl Green, President, and Marion MacTaggart, Vice President, Juniors: Maurine Frantz, President and Marquis E. James, Vice President; Sophomores: Mildred Ingle, President and Edith Robb, Vice President; Freshmen: Ray Barr, President and Herman Ryan, Vice President.

Enid was 15 years old by this time. Twelve high school classes had graduated. The class of 1898

had two seniors, but 1909 had 14 and 1910 had 20. It was 1913 before any graduates could say they had received all their education in Enid. That year six of the graduates could make that claim: George Feild, May Cullison, Carrie Kelly Jones, Harry Frantz, Clarence Sanders and Homer Goltry.

His senior year Marquis James was editor-in-chief of The Quill. The associate editor was Irene M. Cullison. The business manager was C. Burney Corbett. Students serving as reporters from the various school departments in the publication's first year were: Ethel Randall, Horace Copple, Helen Oldham, Maybell Stuart, Maurine Frantz, Clell Skinner, Wanda Kerr, Marian MacTaggart, Leslie Counts, Harry Stiles, Will Oldham, and Birdie McKenzie served as report for the alumni.

Tragedy struck the James family when Marquis was halfway through high school with the sudden death of his father. In 1909, Marquis took a job with the Wave-Democrat. After awhile, he took a 2 p.m. to midnight job on the Morning News. During his senior year he attended three morning classes then report at 1:30 p.m. at the News office. Near the end of the term he switched to the Enid Daily Eagle.

He also was industrious enough to contact other newspapers, such as the Wichita Eagle and the Oklahoman in Oklahoma City. He served as their correspondent, sending them Enid area news items.

Marquis attended Oklahoma Christian University (now Phillips University) the next year but found it difficult to continue his newspaper work and attend classes.

Hard times hit then and Marquis quit school. Next his job was terminated, but he was soon back at work handling the circulation department for the Enid Eagle.

One day he met J.L. Isenberg, former owner of the Wave, the newspaper not always too friendly in its comments about Marquis' father. Isenberg was in Enid on a visit from California. The two of them sat on a bench under a shade tree on the Square.

Isenberg questioned James about his newspaper career and ended up giving him some advice: "I have no son. No chick, nor child. But had I a son, I'd tell him what I tell you, and that is to move around a bit before you settle down . . . see the world; see it while you're young, while your sap's runnin'."

Isenberg was not a man Marquis had ever thought of as a person from whom to seek advice. But what old "Isey" said was right down the path Marquis had been considering. Two weeks later he was on a train heading for Kansas City.

He worked awhile for the Kansas City Journal, then the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, the New Orleans Item and was assistant editor of the Chicago Evening Journal. By 1916 he was rewrite man for the New York Tribune.

After serving the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I and being wounded

in the front lines, he returned to the United States and wrote “A History of the American Legion.” He also edited the American Legion monthly magazine.

From 1923 until his death in 1955, James wrote numerous books. At the time of his death, he had been researching data for a biography of Booker T. Washington.

Many books from his personal library were given to Enid Public Library and are in the room named for him, The Marquis James Room, which houses much of the history of the pioneer days in the Strip.

It’s the kind of memorial which would please the little Enid boy who frequented Enid’s book stores, the library and the newspaper offices during his youth . . . and who helped start The Quill Annual, which has been enjoyed by EHS students since 1908.

About Stella Campbell Rockwell



Stella Rockwell was a noted local historian who co-authored two important historical volumes on local history. Her first published “O County Faces and Places” a book she co-authored with Velma Troxel Jayne in 1968. her second publication was “Garfield County History: 1893-1982” published by the Garfield County Historical Society. Stella’s husband Glenn was a co-author.